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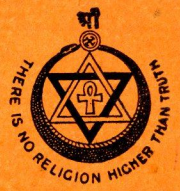
Theosophy

THREE SIMPLE TRUTHS



ADDRESS

Delivered (by request) July 26th, 1908, at Universalist Church, Cor. 10th St. and Park Ave., Kansas City, Mo.

—BY—

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THEOSOPHY—Three Simple Truths.

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I am thankful for this opportunity of speaking on Theosophy before a sympathetic audience. Before commencing with my address proper it might be well for me to state that Theosophists do not, in the ordinary way of proselyting, seek converts to their philosophy, except that, in so far as it is possible, a Theosophist is always thankful and ready to avail himself of opportunities, when presented, and even to seek them, to justify publicly his abiding faith in his belief. In other words, Theosophists believe in and practice universal religious toleration, accepting the teaching of the inspired Teacher, who says:

"However men approach Me, even so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side is Mine."

I have spoken of Theosophy as a philosophy, preferring that word to religion, because religion is largely a matter of belief based upon hereditary or acquired faith, while philosophy is a belief based upon logic and knowledge. But whatever one's religious professions may be, his true religion is his conception of the philosophy of life. He may profess Christianity, and be a so-called pillar in the Church, but if his controlling philosophy is to seek possessions for the enjoyment of the personal self, whether these possessions are temporal or spiritual, he is not truly a Christian, but in reality is a materialist. He who seeks salvation merely for his personal self is not fitted for immortality.

Theosophy translated means "Divine Wisdom," or "God's Wisdom," or the Truth. What, then, is Theosophy? Theosophy is Truth. But what is Truth? that question which has throughout all ages perplexed man? To a Theosophist there can be but one answer: "Truth is the Wisdom of God," and the Truth of anything is the way it appears

to the consciousness of God. The motto of the Theosophical Society, therefore, is: "There is no religion higher than Truth." Whatever, then, is true is Theosophical; whatever is not true is not Theosophical. Truth, then, is the very soul, the essence of the philosophy of Theosophy.

All knowledge may be said to be included in the three departments of learning known as Religion, Science and Philosophy. A Theosophical student, therefore, seeking truth along all lines, and with universal tolerance, is equally interested in these three departments of learning, and he finds Truth in the Gospel according to St. John, and in the Bhagavad Gita; in the writings of the Church fathers, and in Emerson and Plato; in Astronomy, in Geology, in Art, in Mathematics, and in the philosophy of Kant and Hegel. Wherever the hand of God hath wrought he seeks for Truth.

To attempt in this brief talk to give even an outline of Theosophical teachings would be very difficult, and probably would be confusing and profitless. The literature of Theosophy includes hundreds of volumes and more volumes are added each year, as more and more the Truth is unfolded. To become a Theosophist is synonymous with becoming a student, for Theosophy is not a philosophy or a religion that he who runs may read. It contains truths, however, so simple that the least developed may draw from them much spiritual help and growth; and it contains truths so profound that compared with them the deepest scholastic philosophy is but a shallow pool.

Our ability to perceive truth depends upon the stage of our evolution, and perception increases in proportion as we evolve. For instance, by this audience the simple statement "God is good" would be unquestionably accepted as true, but not so by the grossly ignorant or the savage, who think of God only as a Being to be feared and propitiated. But even a simple truth like "God is good" sequentially and logically carried to conclusion would overthrow many religious creeds currently accepted by good and intelligent people. Theosophy sequentially and logically argues from premises to conclusions and is not swerved one hair's breadth by fears of the results of the syllogism. We will, therefore, for the purposes of this talk, take three simple truths,

which all can comprehend, and which the great religions of the world have accepted, and, with more or less limitations to suit man-made creeds, have taught; but which Theosophy accepts in their entirety without limitations, and with all their logical consequences and conclusions. And we will endeavor to briefly outline the Theosophical philosophy as the same is contained in these truths.

These three simple Truths stated in the simplest language are: "Man is immortal"; "God is good"; "Whatsoever a man soeth, that shall he also reap."

We will take the first Truth, "Man is immortal." This simple truth, with its logical conclusions, and as forming a part of the Theosophical philosophy is more completely expressed and unfolded in the words of a great teacher, as follows:

"The soul of man is immortal, and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendor has no limit."

All great religions teach the immortality of the soul; and if they do not all do so in all instances in their exoteric teachings, that is, teachings intended for the public, the masses, they at any rate do so in their esoteric teachings, that is, teachings intended for the student and those more intellectually and spiritually developed. The Christian religion, with which in this country we are more intimately concerned, teaches man's immortality, but, as now publicly taught, does not carry the teaching to its necessary logical, scientific and philosophical conclusions. It is a philosophical axiom, as plain as the mathematical axiom that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, that that which has a beginning in time must have an ending in time. We cannot conceive of an infinite or eternal thing with a time limitation, or with a beginning or ending. Therefore, if the soul is immortal, it did not come into existence in this physical life by any arbitrary exercise of absolute power, such as by special creation, but must have preexisted from all eternity. Theosophy recognizes this philosophical concept as absolutely true, and its conception of man is that he is a "divine fragment" emanated from God, not created by Him, but a part of God, an emanation from Him. This "divine fragment," technically called the

"Monad," being of Him and in Him, is, therefore, and always has been potentially divine, and through the operation of Universal Law, through ages upon ages, upon planet after planet, in world system after world system, He, the Monad, evolves by gathering and assimilating experiences, by overcoming the matter side of Nature, passing through what are known as the elemental, mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, ever onward and upward, slowly but surely, to the human kingdom; and will continue to evolve, as evolution never stops or rests, ever onward and upward, slowly but surely, until spirit is triumphant over matter, and his potentially divine qualities have become active powers. Then he has become perfect, even as his Father in heaven is perfect, and he passes out of, above and beyond the human kingdom into what may be called the superhuman or divine kingdom, and still he continues to evolve as his future "is the future of a thing whose growth and splendor has no limit."

Theosophists are, therefore, fundamentally evolutionists. In their philosophy of evolution, however, they differ very materially from the so-called scientific evolutionary school of Darwin, Spencer, Fiske and others.

Theosophists postulate an enormously longer period of time in which evolution in this world system has been at work.

Their evolution is much more complete and far reaching than the commonly accepted scientific doctrine. Scientific evolution recognizes merely an evolution of bodies, or, as Theosophists term them, forms, while Theosophy teaches an evolution of life, consciousness, as well as of forms.

The forms we occupy are but the temporary garments of their potentially divine indwellers. The forms, of course, have reached their present stage of adaptability and perfection through evolution, but the indwelling life or consciousness also through the same law of evolution has reached its present stage of development, intellectual and spiritual.

Theosophy, therefore, teaches an evolution of life, the "Monad," the spirit, as well as an evolution of bodies or forms.

Any thinker, who is not a materialist, must recognize

that there is in the universe spirit as well as matter, that these two are the two necessary opposite poles of Being, one the life, the other the form side of all manifested existence.

All natural laws are universal. This is a self-evident truth, for we cannot conceive of a law of nature working intermittently, taking a rest, or being in any way limited within its sphere of activity. Theosophy recognizes such laws as the expressed will of God, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow or turning." Logically, then, there must be an evolution of life, consciousness, spirit; for this is the real, the immortal part, as well as an evolution of form, the merely temporary garment worn by the life to contact the physical worlds.

The Law of Evolution, as thus taught by Theosophy, makes plain the many unsolved problems of evolution as but partly comprehended and taught in the physical sciences. The evolution of the life, the consciousness is the real purpose of the law, as taught by Theosophy, which is that the evolving life may grow, expand, develop through experiences, and thus convert potentiality into active powers; and this can only be accomplished by means of material contact through forms. By material contacts through forms we do not mean to indicate that such experiences are only obtained in the physical world, in these physical garments we are here and now wearing, and which we call our bodies. But in the higher worlds, invisible to physical perception, spirit, in order to manifest, must still be encased in forms, although these forms will be composed of more subtle kinds of matter than what we know as physical matter; as, for instance, in the astral and heaven or mental worlds the consciousness manifests in forms made up of the matter of those worlds, or planes of Nature. To merely make plain, without going into details, the Theosophical teachings regarding the constitution of matter, its various planes of destiny, etc., is impracticable in an elementary talk like this, and I will, therefore, not attempt it. Consciousness, however, no matter how highly evolved, cannot manifest except by playing upon matter, setting up vibrations; and these vibrations underly all phenomena on all planes of Nature, and, there-

fore, in the higher worlds as well as in the physical world.

While this simple truth, "Man is immortal," as more fully unfolded as previously quoted, does not specifically teach reincarnation, yet it logically implies and contains it. The Law of Reincarnation is that the "I," the indwelling "divine fragment," dwells in the flesh, not once, but many times, returning to earth again and again, and many times again, as long as physical experiences are needed for growth, returning in different personalities, adding a little in each personality it ensouls to its stores of experience, which it converts into wisdom, until it is finally triumphant over physical matter, and returns not again to physical existence, but enters into the Eternal Peace, there to continue to evolve on higher levels, as "its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendor has no limit."

Philosophically, as previously stated, immortality implies pre-existence, and pre-existence implies reincarnation. In Oriental countries where, among the educated, reincarnation is almost universally accepted as a Law of Nature, a word is used to express it which is usually translated as "transmigration," meaning the passage of the soul from one body to another. This word as now commonly used in the English language conveys the idea of the possible passage of human souls into animal bodies. On account of this meaning oftentimes given to the word, Theosophists use the word reincarnation; as the Theosophical philosophy teaches that the "divine fragment," the "Monad," having in the onward sweep of evolution entered the human kingdom, cannot ever return to a lower kingdom; and once a man, always a man, until the human stage is passed, and the super-human or divine stage is reached.

There is an evolution and a dissolution of forms, for when a form or class or family of forms has answered the purposes of the evolving life it in time passes away. Of this the rocks, the geological deposits, contain innumerable examples. So with nations and civilizations. They come, live awhile, and pass away, leaving their cities and the records of their echievements buried in the drifting desert sands. But the evolving life that uses these forms as its instruments never grows old, never decays, but, having learned the

lessons to be learned in the forms that have passed away, in new and better forms it presses onward and upward, though with infinite slowness, perhaps, as seen by our limited vision. God does not grow old. Evolution is always a forward, never a backward movement, and the phenomena of dissolution are but a phase of evolution, as forms only grow old and disappear when more highly adapted forms, suitable for the evolving life, take their place.

In the light of the Law of Reincarnation, when fully understood, taken together with the Law of Karma, the Theosophical term for the third simple truth aforementioned, and which we will soon reach in our discussion, life ceases to be an enigma, and the nature, method and purpose of life, existence, is rationalized and made plain.

In this talk I cannot go into the psychical side of Theosophy, but merely have time to touch upon a few points of its philosophy. If time permitted it might be shown that reincarnation is a living fact with many, based upon actual memory extending back into previous incarnations, and that many know, not intuitively alone, or as a philosophical and logical necessity alone, but by actual memory impressed by the indwelling Ego on the physical brain consciousness, that they have trod this earth many times before.

We will now pass to the second Truth, "God is good," which simple truth, as forming a part of the Theosophical philosophy, is more completely unfolded by a great teacher, as follows:

"The principle which gives life dwells in us, and without us, is undying and eternally beneficent, is not heard or seen or smelt, but is perceived by the man who desires perception."

Let us briefly see what we can learn from this second simple truth.

First: The principle which gives life, which is God, is omnipresent; is immanent in all Nature. In our Solar System, the Solar Logos, who to us is all we can conceive of Power, Wisdom, Glory or Goodness, and to us is Almighty God, is immanent in all matters and force throughout the System; matter is the form side of His Being, and force is the life side, the expression of His will. He is everywhere,

in all, and is all; in Him we live, move and have our being. Is this orthodox or is it Pantheism? What matter it by what name we call it? The heterodoxy of to-day is the orthodoxy of to-morrow, and so on and on. Creeds come and go, but this concept of the immanence of God in all Nature philosophically is, and must ever be true.

Second: God is eternally good. Some things we know, as the philosophers say *a priori,* that is, without being reasoned out. We call this intuition, and when applied to ethics, conscience. Theosophy defines such knowledge, which surpasses reason, as the essence of experiences brought over from past lives, or the wisdom the Ego has stored up in his long pilgrimage through past lives, and which He is able to impress on these dull physical brains of ours. People in our stage of evolution know *a priori,* by reason, intuition or conscience that God is good; we cannot conceive of the eternal life-giving principle, which is God, being otherwise than eternally beneficent. Now, God being immanent in all Nature, and being eternally good, all things must be good, and "whatsoever is, is right." We must, therefore, modify our ideas of good and evil, for evil then becomes, as it were, a lesser or a kind of good. In this physical world, rightly called a world of sorrow, we see, if we do not ourselves individually experience, so much suffering and sorrow, so much sin, so much seeming injustice, that at first view a man might be considered unbalanced, who stated that there was good in evil or that evil was good. But so it must be, for God is in all, and, therefore, in the evil as well as in the good, and He is eternally beneficent.

One can only obtain a rational conception of good and evil in the light furnished by the Law or Reincarnation, and the Law of Karma, our third simple truth that we reap what we sow. This sowing, which causes the suffering and sin of to-day, may have occurred a physical life or several lives ago. The terms good and evil, or right and wrong, are relative terms; what is good and right in one country or age of the world, or in one stage of development, becomes evil and wrong in another country or age or stage of development. That which works with the upward evolutionary force is ever good, though to our limited vision it may

appear as evil; that which works against this force is evil, and yet it is a lesser good, for by overcoming it we grow and evolve. Our vices, by being overcome, become stepping stones to our virtues. What is a virtue but a vice overcome? We grow by putting forth effort in overcoming, and evil is, therefore, a necessary factor in evolution, a submerged or hidden good. Remember that it is he that overcometh that becomes a pillar in the temple of God, and goeth no more out; for by overcoming he has finished his human evolution and passed on into higher activities.

Then again we learn from this truth that God is not a jealous God, for God is good, God is love. He does not delight in sacrifices that bring pain or sorrow, but only in the sacrifice of service, which brings joy.

Again we learn that we must not form any anthropomorphic conceptions of Him; He cannot be cognized through the physical senses, but can only be perceived through the inner senses. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God;" they see and feel the God within. The false anthropomorphic conception of God has long held many religions in bondage, and hid the true light.

We will now pass to the third great but simple truth, which, in the language of St. Paul, is: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

This simple truth is also more completely unfolded by a great teacher as follows:

"Each man is his own absolute law-giver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself, the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment."

Theosophists call this truth the Law of Karma, Karma being a word from the Sanscrit and expressing in itself all that is contained in the saying of St. Paul, and the more detailed teaching just quoted. Karma is the law of cause and effect, or the law of equilibrium, or, as stated by Emerson, the law of compensation.

Theosophy teaches that this law is a universal law of Nature, and, therefore, operative throughout the universe, spiritually, morally, mentally, emotionally, as well as physically. That this law is universal in the physical world is

taught by science; and, in fact, without its universal operation in the physical world, science would be impossible. This law is recognized as a universal law, applicable, as a universal law must be to be universal, to mind and consciousness, as well as to matter, by all the great religions, but with more or less limitations. Science never attempts to curtail the operation of, or limit, a natural law, but religious creeds have a habit of so doing. For instance, in the Mohammedan religion, belief in the law has resulted in a belief in destiny, the fact being overlooked that each man himself and not God makes for each man his own destiny; and this erroneous belief or interpretation of the law has resulted in loss of individual effort and, consequently, in a decadent civilization. The true idea of Karma is expressed by the poet:

> "Look; the clay dries into iron, but the potter moulds the clay;
> Destiny to-day is master; man was master yesterday."

We to-day are bound by the destiny we ourselves created yesterday; to-morrow is our own, but we are to-day making the destiny that will bind us to-morrow. We are the slaves of our yesterdays, but the master of our to-morrows. These words yesterday and to-morrow must not be taken too literally, as our yesterdays run back to the commencement, and our to-morrows forward to the end of our human evolution. The Law of Karma can only be intelligently comprehended, as applicable to conditions, circumstances and environments of our present physical lives, when taken in connection with the Law of Reincarnation. What we are physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually to-day is what we ourselves have earned and made ourselves in the past; and this past extends backward not to our birth into this physical life alone, but backward through all our many past incarnations, since we evolved to the human stage. When the ensouling life is evolving in the animal and lower kingdoms, the evolutionary force presses ever onward; but when the ensouling life enters the human kingdom, free will, and with free will, Karma enter as factors, and these factors hasten or retard evolution, according as they work with or against it.

The complete acceptance of this law without limitation, as applicable to spiritual things, notwithstanding the strong asservations of such an application made by St. Paul, that we must work out our own salvation, etc., is not in accord with prevalent Christian theology, as evidenced by the current Christian teachings regarding miracles, prayers, predestination, vicarious atonement or atonement by substitution, etc.

A miracle is an impossibility, and I say it reverently, an absurdity, if we understand by a miracle a subversion or violation of a Law of Nature. Those phenomena, which the thoughtless or ignorant call miracles, are all in accordance, if they actually took place, with natural laws and forces, and can be performed to-day, as well as of old, by those who have attained to requisite knowledge and spiritual power.

That prayer is often answered we have an abundance of proof, but such answers can all be explained as following the law and not subverting or violating it.

Atonement by substitution, as commonly understood, would be a setting aside of the law for some especially favored person, logically and philosophically an impossibility. God is the same yesterday, to-day and forever. Removing the burdens of our own wrong-doings from our own shoulders, and placing them upon the shoulders of another, cannot be conceived from any view-point as either just or merciful, and would be reaping what we have not sown. Believers in atonement by substitution do not expect to escape either the physical, mental or moral results of their acts in this physical life, but they hope in some way to escape them in a future life where, they are taught, that an eternal punishment awaits the unforgiven sinner. The human makers of creeds having predicated a fictitious, illogical, impossible future state of rewards and punishments, have necessarily predicated illogical and impossible means of obtaining the rewards and escaping the punishments. That reincarnation was esoterically and sometimes exoterically taught by the Christ, and accepted by the apostles, can be shown in various scriptural passages. That it was accepted by many of the early Church fathers is known from their writings, which have been preserved. The loss to the Church

of this knowledge resulted in the gradual building up of creeds, such as the Atonement, based upon the one-life-on-earth theory. But the going into detail here of the Theosophical teachings on miracles, prayer, the Atonement, etc., would consume too much time; and I will, therefore, merely state that such teachings are consistent, coherent, logical, illuminating and satisfying both intellectually and spiritually.

The Law of Karma is the law of exact justice: "With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again." Looked at from below alone, our earthly view-point, it seems at times harsh and merciless; but looked at from above, where the causes lying in the past, and the lessons to be learned and the experiences to be gained in the future, are seen, the Law of Karma is known to be also the Law of Mercy, as well as Justice.

"The heart of it is Love, the end of it is Peace, and Consummation sweet. Obey."

To sum up, Theosophy is a philosophy, the cornerstone of which is Evolution, an evolution extending from the atom to God, and operating in the human kingdom under the Laws of Reincarnation and Karma.

A word about the Theosophical Society and I will close. The Theosophical Society is an organization of students, and their purpose is to learn and to teach Theosophy. The Society has thousands of members, and hundreds of Branches or Lodges scattered throughout the world, having about ninety in these United States. In Kansas City, Mo., there are two Lodges, and in Kansas City, Kan., one.

The stated objects of the Society are three, as follows:

First: To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of Race, Creed, Sex, Caste or Color.

Second: To promote the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science.

Third: To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.

Assent to or sympathy with the first of these only, that is, the Universal Brotherhood object, is required for admission.